

Central Texas Families for Safe Streets

Kathy Sokolic, Chair

Comments to Texas House Committee on Transportation on Interim Charge 1B

September 18, 2020

Thank you Chair Canales and members of the Texas House Committee on Transportation for your focus on ending the epidemic of traffic deaths in Texas. As the Chair of the Central Texas Families for Safe Streets, I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you my family's experience with traffic violence in Texas.

Unfortunately, Central Texas Families for Safe Streets is a growing group, with ten people dying every day on Texas streets, and another fifty suffering horrible, life-altering serious injuries, like my nephew. New stories similar to the one I am sharing with you are happening every day to families across Texas.

On September 12, 2016, my 9-year-old nephew Ben was dropped across the street from his house by a friend. When he crossed the street to go to his home, he was hit by someone driving a pickup truck. He suffered many injuries, including bruised heart and lungs, broken bones, and a terrible traumatic brain injury.

While he is still alive, Ben requires 24-hour home nursing care and cannot eat, breath, speak, walk, or do much of anything on his own. The amount of care and attention and medical supplies that he requires is intense. We had hoped for some improvement, but after 4 years, it's clear that he will not recover, and he continues to decline.

This has absolutely changed my family. Our lives were upended and my sister-in-law can still barely function from the trauma. Ben has a brother that is now 15 and constantly has behavioral issues. Let's not forget the driver and the impact on her life (she also had a baby in the truck when she hit Ben).

These crazy COVID-19 times have been even worse than normal - we can't see our family for fear of infecting Ben, his mom, dad, or brother, or one of his caretakers. Ben's family can't leave the house, for fear of catching it and bringing it to him. It's been a tricky year, especially for them.

The speed limit on this neighborhood street was 30 miles per hour when Ben was hit, and the street is one of the widest in our neighborhood, which makes it easier to drive faster.

We are hoping to see the *Safe Neighborhood Streets* bill given top priority and an early hearing by the House Committee on Transportation this session. We should lower the default speed limit on residential streets statewide from 30 to 25 mph, and make it easier for neighborhoods to lower their own speed limits to 20 mph where city traffic engineers agree there is a safety need.

Passing the Safe Neighborhood Streets Bill is a step in the right direction to slowing the traffic down, and saving other kids like Ben.

Today, I'm the Chair of a terrible club, full of families who have experienced loss due to traffic violence. I beg all of you, our lawmakers, to use your power to help end traffic deaths across Texas. For all of us, this means not driving drunk or distracted and not speeding.

For you, our elected officials, this means to lead change within our state and get more engaged in the Vision Zero movement. I don't want any more members in this club.

About Central Texas Families for Safe Streets

Texas leads the nation in traffic deaths, with ten families losing a loved one each day and another fifty families suffering a life-changing serious injury. We don't accept this.

Together we are survivors and families who have experienced suffering and loss of our loved ones to traffic violence in Central Texas. We are a community of grief, of intention and of action. We create conscious change. Together we reclaim our streets.

The City of Austin adopted Vision Zero several years ago and has made progress but people keep being hurt. In 2019, TXDOT adopted a system safety approach and the Texas Transportation Commission adopted a goal of ending traffic deaths across the state by 2050 and reallocated \$300 million a year to targeted, data-based safety interventions, but we have so much work to do to get to the day where families are not suffering from this traffic violence.

We're doing something about this.

Central Texas Families for Safe Streets (CTFSS) is part of the national movement to end this epidemic. CTFSS is independently led by members, but supported by Farm&City, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Central Texas Families for Safe Streets (CTFSS) serves as a resource for individuals and families who have been affected through loss and suffering from traffic violence involving a motor vehicle.

CTFSS's mission is to promote alternative and safe transportation options through policy and legislation, advocacy, community outreach and empowerment. We envision streets where pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles can safely co-exist, and children and adults are no longer endangered – where no loss of life in traffic is acceptable.

<http://www.ctfss.org>